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# ***Town of Natick***

**Human Services Study**  
DRAFT Final Report

September 22, 2011



# ***Town of Natick***

## **Human Services Study – Initial Report**

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### **Table of Contents**

<b><u>Item</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<b>Section I: Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Section II: Current Service Delivery Model</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Section III: Alternative Service Delivery Models</b>	<b>16</b>
- Privatization of Human Service Programs	
- Combining of Municipal Departments & Programs	
<b>Section IV: Comparable Communities</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Section V: Recommendations &amp; Next Steps</b>	<b>20</b>



# ***Town of Natick***

Human Services Study – Initial Report

---

## **Section I: Executive Summary**



# *Town of Natick*

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

---

### **Section I: Executive Summary**

Since the founding of the first village, those who have been charged with operating the affairs of local government have traditionally been responsible for three primary concerns of its citizens: their Health, Safety, and Welfare. Over the course of the last century, local governments have continuously evolved to respond to the ever-changing needs of their citizens. Natick is no different. Whereas 100 years ago the Town of Natick primarily provided services in the areas of Public Safety, Education & Learning, Public Works and Public Health<sup>1</sup>, today Natick is a full-service community providing those services as well as services in Recreation, Social and Senior Services.

It is important when undertaking a review of any topic to define what key terms are. For the purpose of this study 'Human Services' is defined as "meeting human needs through an interdisciplinary knowledge base, focusing on prevention as well as remediation of problems, and maintaining a commitment to improving the overall quality of life of service populations. The Human Services profession is one which promotes improved service delivery systems by addressing not only the quality of direct services, but also by seeking to improve accessibility, accountability, and coordination among professionals and agencies in service delivery."<sup>2</sup> Natick has a well-established history of supporting these services, recognizing that meeting the social needs of the community and its residents is an important function of local government.

Just as the needs of our citizens change and evolve, so too must our provision of services to meet those needs. This study is intended to be a first and significant step in evaluating the Town's delivery of Human Services, a critical evaluation given the impending opening of the Community/Senior Center (scheduled to open late summer/early fall 2012).

The new Community/Senior Center is specifically designed to offer a diverse array of programming for all ages. While the Council on Aging, Human Services, and Veterans' Services Departments have historically been housed at the Town's Senior Center, significant Recreation and Parks Department programming will be incorporated into the overall scheduling and delivery of activities at this facility. For purposes of this study, the four departments that will be represented at the new Community/Senior Center (Council on Aging, Human Services, Veterans' Services and Recreation and Parks) will be referred to as the Human Services Departments.

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<sup>1</sup> Natick Town Reports: 1910. Review Printing Company. Natick, MA. 1911.

<sup>2</sup> National Organization for Human Services website [www.nationalhumanservices.org/what-is-human-services](http://www.nationalhumanservices.org/what-is-human-services)



# *Town of Natick*

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

---

The overarching objective of this study is to evaluate opportunities to smooth the transition into the new Community/Senior Center, specifically the resulting merging of personnel, operations and programs. It is essential that we assess now how to best promote collaboration between and among these departments, because “if the physical aspects of a building are superb and the programming and operations are lacking, the facility will not be as successful.”<sup>3</sup> Given the community’s investment in the new Community/Senior Center and the importance of the programs to be offered there, it is essential that the delivery of these programs is successful.

This report lays out many important aspects of Human Services provision in Natick, including:

- Describing the current service model
- Listing the Communities to which Natick will be compared
- Providing alternative organizational structures for the delivery of Human Services

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<sup>3</sup> Town of Natick Community Senior Center Feasibility Study – Needs Assessment; prepared by Catlin Architecture, August 2006



# ***Town of Natick***

Human Services Study – Initial Report

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## **Section II:**

# **Current Service Delivery Model**



# ***Town of Natick***

## **Human Services Study – Initial Report**

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### **Section II: Current Service Delivery Model**

The delivery of Human Services to Natick residents is provided by both the municipal government and a variety of private agencies in the Town of Natick and the region. The Town offers a variety of programs through the Council on Aging, Human Services, Veterans' Services and Recreation and Parks Departments.

The following departmental information is excerpted from their respective web pages.

- The Council on Aging provides an opportunity for senior citizens to come together, as individuals and as part of groups, for services and activities that help meet their needs. These services and programs enhance dignity, support independence and encourage involvement with the community. The Council on Aging's mission is to provide advocacy and support systems for Natick's 6,500+ older adults, focusing on issues of aging by working with them toward the ultimate goal of independence and improvement of their quality of life and preparation for life change. The Council on Aging staff provides social and support services and programs through a multipurpose Senior Center, advocacy for senior citizens and individuals with disabilities of all ages with local, state and federal programs and governments, coordination of volunteer services town-wide, wellness, intergenerational and other programs, health services and support for chronic disease self-management, partnerships with other agencies and organizations for planning wellness, and prevention programs, and more.
- The mission of the Human Services Department is to ensure that health and human services are provided, available, and accessible to all residents of the Town by contracting with private agencies as well as staff-provision of services. The Department partners with other Town Departments, schools, local and state agencies, religious organizations, local civic groups, local businesses, etc. for the planning and delivery of services and assisting families and individuals in accessing public and private benefits. Staff also provides case management and crisis intervention to individuals and families.
- The Veterans' Services Office is responsible for the needs of the Veterans of Natick and their dependents. It assists in filing for Veterans' Benefits, which is a state run program, or filing for Federal Benefits, such as VA service-connected or non-service connected disabilities or compensation. The office is instrumental in securing housing, assisting veterans with medical care referrals, educational benefits, job search, emergency funds, counseling, applying for Social Security, Social Security Supplemental Income, Social Security Disability, Unemployment Compensation, Military Records, and Annuities. It assists in filing of applications for grave markers and any other veterans'-related applications.



# *Town of Natick*

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

---

- The Recreation and Parks Department is responsible for planning, organizing and implementing leisure programs and facilities that serve the physical, emotional, and social needs of all the residents of the community, regardless of one's ability. The Recreation and Parks Department is also responsible for the establishment of park regulations and the permitting of all community fields, parks and playgrounds including coordinating and scheduling of all town leisure groups at these facilities. The activities of the department are overseen by the Recreation and Parks Commission. The Commission is responsible for the policy, programs and procedures associated with the delivery of year round high quality indoor and outdoor recreational activities for Town residents.

Several other municipal departments and committees offer some level of Human Service-related programming or services, including the Morse Institute and Bacon Free Libraries, the Natick School Department, the Commission on Disability, Youth Advisory Board, and others. In addition, many private agencies in Natick and throughout the region offer services that are similar or complimentary to those offered by Natick's Human Services departments. Ideally, the sum of services offered by these various agencies should be fully responsive to the community needs with minimal duplication of services. Communication and collaboration between and among these agencies is the key to ensuring this outcome.

### Organizational Structure and Budgets

At present, Human Services are delivered by four municipal departments. Their organizational (staffing) charts and budgets are shown below.

#### Human Services & Council on Aging

In addition to their annual appropriation in support of department personnel and operations, the Human Services & Council on Aging department receives authorizations for two revolving funds from Town Meeting. The department also applies for and has been successful in receiving grants from a variety of sources, including the Metrowest Community Health Care Foundation and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Some grants received are one-time, while some are eligible to be renewed on an ongoing basis and support ongoing operations. Of note organizationally, since 2003, the daily activities of the Human Services Department have been managed by the Director of Council on Aging. To reflect these dual responsibilities, the Director's job title was changed to Director of Human Services and Council on Aging in 2008.



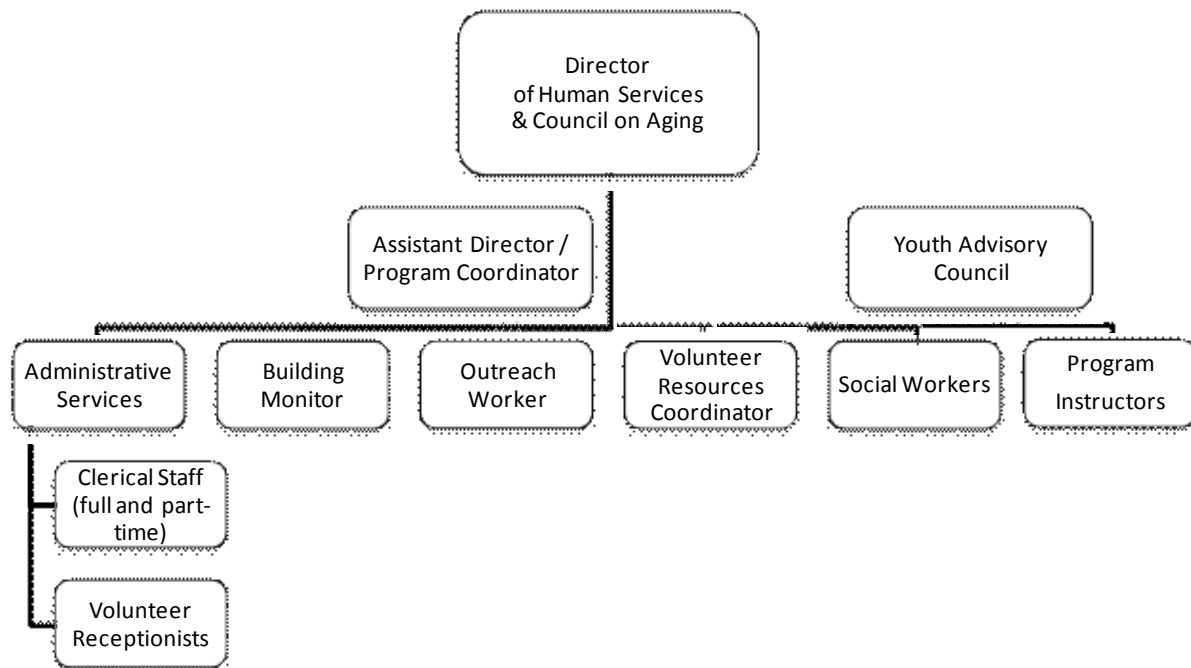
# Town of Natick

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

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The Human Services Division employs one full-time social worker, one approximately 0.75 social worker, one Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and other personnel as shown below.

### Organizational Chart





# Town of Natick

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

### Departmental Budget

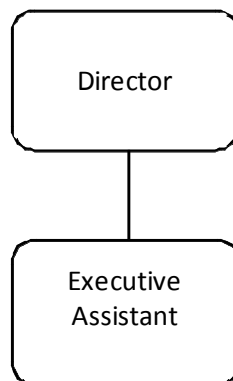
Department: Human Services & Council on Aging

	2009 Actual	2010 Actual	2011 Appropriated	2012 Appropriated	2011 vs. 2012 \$ (+/-) % (+/-)	
<b>Salaries</b>						
Personnel Services	\$ 321,455	\$ 321,180	\$ 331,337	\$ 376,934	\$ 45,597	13.76%
<b>Total Salaries</b>	<b>\$ 321,455</b>	<b>\$ 321,180</b>	<b>\$ 331,337</b>	<b>\$ 376,934</b>	<b>\$ 45,597</b>	<b>13.76%</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>						
Purchase of Services	\$ 12,168	\$ 11,387	\$ 22,084	\$ 21,734	\$ (350)	-1.58%
Supplies	\$ 2,663	\$ 2,699	\$ 3,388	\$ 3,388	\$ -	0.00%
Other Chgs./Expend.	\$ 12,978	\$ 11,183	\$ 19,000	\$ 17,000	\$ (2,000)	-10.53%
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 27,810</b>	<b>\$ 25,268</b>	<b>\$ 44,472</b>	<b>\$ 42,122</b>	<b>\$ (2,350)</b>	<b>-5.28%</b>
<b>Total COA &amp; HS</b>	<b>\$ 349,265</b>	<b>\$ 346,448</b>	<b>\$ 375,809</b>	<b>\$ 419,056</b>	<b>\$ 43,247</b>	<b>11.51%</b>

### Veterans' Services Department

The Veterans' Services Department includes funding for a full-time Veterans' Services Director (as mandated by the state department of Veterans Services) and a full-time Executive Assistant. Expenditures for direct benefits to Veterans are reimbursed 75% by the Commonwealth.

### Organizational Chart





# Town of Natick

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

### Departmental Budget

#### Department: Veterans Services

	2009 Actual	2010 Actual	2011 Appropriated	2012 Appropriated	2011 vs. 2012 \$ (+/-)    % (+/-)	
<b>Salaries</b>						
Personnel Services	\$ 106,558	\$ 95,745	\$ 109,756	\$ 113,504	\$ 3,748	3.41%
<b>Total Salaries</b>	<b>\$ 106,558</b>	<b>\$ 95,745</b>	<b>\$ 109,756</b>	<b>\$ 113,504</b>	<b>\$ 3,748</b>	<b>3.41%</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>						
Purchase of Services	\$ 3,881	\$ 2,853	\$ 5,275	\$ 6,275	\$ 1,000	18.96%
Supplies	\$ 750	\$ 706	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500	\$ -	0.00%
Other Chgs./Expend. - Veterans	\$ 146,541	\$ 140,130	\$ 142,310	\$ 154,310	\$ 12,000	8.43%
Other Chgs./Expend. - Holiday	\$ 14,807	\$ 14,494	\$ 16,000	\$ 17,000	\$ 1,000	6.25%
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 165,979</b>	<b>\$ 158,183</b>	<b>\$ 165,085</b>	<b>\$ 179,085</b>	<b>\$ 14,000</b>	<b>8.48%</b>
<b>Total Veterans' Services</b>	<b>\$ 272,537</b>	<b>\$ 253,928</b>	<b>\$ 274,841</b>	<b>\$ 292,589</b>	<b>\$ 17,748</b>	<b>6.46%</b>

### Recreation Department

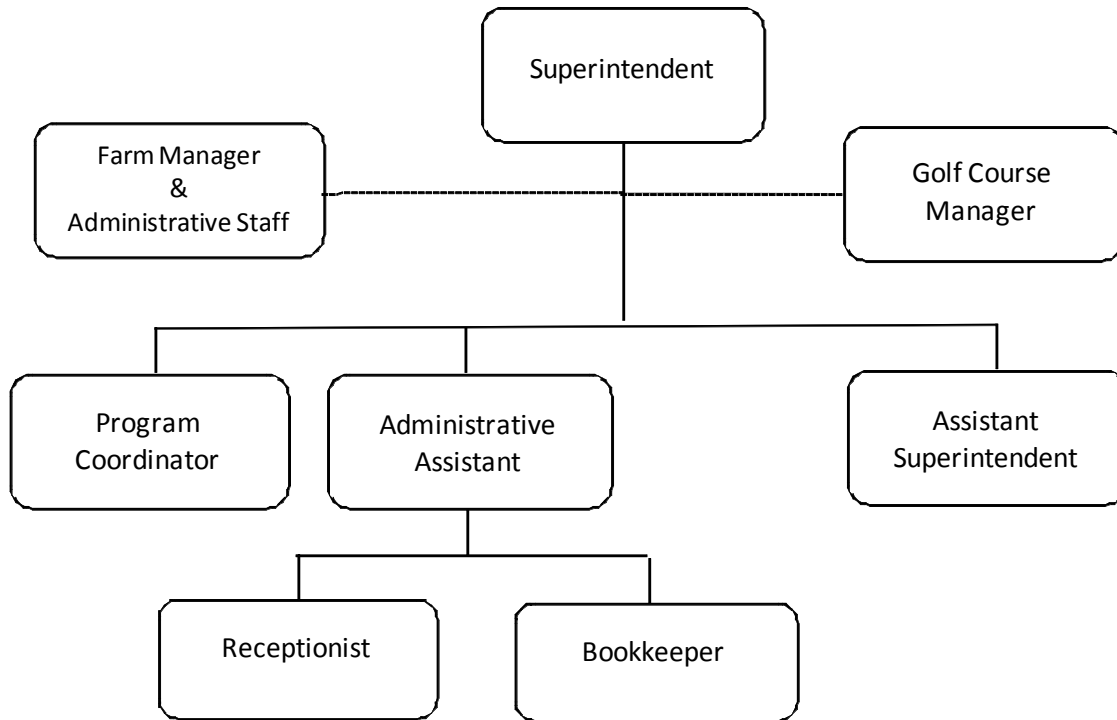
In addition to the Supervisor of Recreation and Parks, the Recreation Department employs several year-round mid-level managers and office support staff. The department also oversees two unique operations and their staff – the Sassamon Trace Golf Course and the Natick Community Organic Farm, and is involved with the privately-managed, Town-owned Chase Arena ice skating rink.



# Town of Natick

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

### Organizational Chart



### Departmental Budget

#### Department: Recreation

	2009 Actual	2010 Actual	2011 Appropriated	2012 Appropriated	2011 vs. 2012	
					\$	%
<b>Salaries</b>						
Personnel Services	499,978	503,459	482,806	502,285	19,479	4.0%
<b>Total Salaries</b>	<b>499,978</b>	<b>503,459</b>	<b>482,806</b>	<b>502,285</b>	<b>19,479</b>	<b>4.0%</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>						
Purchase of Services	20,979	19,846	16,020	19,495	3,475	21.7%
Other Services Misc.	385	381	400	400	0	0.0%
Technical/Professional Serv.	10,812	11,290	11,214	11,842	628	5.6%
Supplies	6,243	5,493	5,000	5,000	0	0.0%
Other Supplies	27,540	27,612	21,800	21,550	-250	-1.1%
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>65,958</b>	<b>64,621</b>	<b>54,434</b>	<b>58,287</b>	<b>3,853</b>	<b>7.1%</b>
<b>Total Recreation</b>	<b>565,936</b>	<b>568,080</b>	<b>537,240</b>	<b>560,572</b>	<b>23,332</b>	<b>4.34%</b>



# *Town of Natick*

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

---

### Citizen Interaction & Oversight

In addition to the users of the services provided by the Council on Aging, Human Services, Veterans' Services and Recreation and Parks Departments, several citizen committees and associated organizations play important roles in the provision of human services to Natick.

First, an 11 member Council on Aging Board comprised of Natick residents is appointed by the Natick Board of Selectmen. Pursuant to the 1969 by vote of Town Meeting to establish the Council on Aging, the purpose of the board is to a) identify the total needs of the elderly population, b) educate the community on the needs of seniors, c) encourage participation from the community to meet the needs of seniors, d) advocate and implement programs designed to respond to those needs, e) coordinate with social service agencies and where appropriate appoint representatives to said agencies, and f) cooperate with federal and state agencies and elected officials regarding legislative and budgetary issues affecting elders.

In addition, the Elderly & Disabled Taxation Fund Committee and the Youth Advisory Board provide support and oversight of particular programs which are central to the functions of the Human Services and the Council on Aging Department. Other ad hoc committees, such as the Community/Senior Center Building Committee, are more temporary and provide critical oversight for particular projects.

The Friends of Natick Senior Center, Inc. serves to raise money for the benefit of the Senior Center and to promote the well-being of Natick's elderly. It is an incorporated 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. The organization is governed by a board of not less than 7 nor more than 15 members elected by the dues-paying "Friends."

The Veterans' Services Director serves as staff liaison to the Town's Commission on Disability. Per MGL Chapter 40, section 8J, such commission shall research local problems of people with disabilities; advise and assist municipal officials and employees in ensuring compliance with state and federal laws and regulations that affect people with disabilities; coordinate or carry out programs designed to meet the problems of people with disabilities; review and make recommendations about policies, procedures, services, activities and facilities of town agencies as they affect people with disabilities; provide information, referrals, guidance and technical assistance in all matters pertaining to disability; and coordinate activities of other local groups organized for similar purposes.

The Recreation and Parks Commission is an advisory board with respect to all matters relating to recreational programs conducted by the Recreation and Parks Department and on the maintenance of the recreational facilities where these programs are conducted. The Commission



# *Town of Natick*

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

---

is responsible for ensuring that programs are devised and conducted to meet the leisure time needs of all segments of the population.

The Superintendent of Recreation and Parks also works closely with the Friends of Sassamon Trace which, like the Friends of the Natick Senior Center, is an incorporated 501 (c) (3) charitable organization; their purpose is to raise funds in support of the Sassamon Trace golf course.

These multiple volunteer, citizen committees greatly enhance the Town's ability to do more with less but also create the potential for competing priorities in an organizational structure in which the relevant administrative departments are consolidated into one.

The question for this study to evaluate is: Does the existing organizational structure provide the best opportunities to maximize collaboration among the many departments and agencies that deliver human services to Natick residents? The following section explores two alternative approaches in the way these services are delivered.



# ***Town of Natick***

Human Services Study – Initial Report

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## **Section III: Alternatives**



# ***Town of Natick***

## **Human Services Study – Initial Report**

---

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### **Section III: Alternatives**

As part of this ongoing study, administration has researched alternatives to the current service delivery model, two of which are summarized below. While these are by no means the only options that could be investigated, they represent the most common alternatives employed by communities evaluating opportunities to enhance human service delivery.

#### **(1) Contracting Out/Privatizing Human Service Functions**

As the title says, this alternative would consist of the Town of Natick taking some or all of the Town's appropriation for salaries and expenses of the Council on Aging, Human Services, Veterans' Services and/or Recreation Departments and using those funds to contract out to a third party provider. In this analysis, careful consideration and further investigation must be performed to evaluate how local third-party agencies provide services to Natick's population, and as importantly if any of the services and programs currently provided by the Town could be performed at lower cost by contracting out. Such privatization, if pursued, is subject to a competitive bidding process pursuant to MGL Chapter 30B.

#### **(2) Consolidation of Municipal Departments & Programs**

This alternative involves the consolidation of existing municipal departments in an effort to achieve greater efficiency and/or effectiveness in the delivery of Human Services to citizens of Natick. Somewhat ironically, such a proposal is effectively a re-visitation of a prior model of service delivery used in Natick – that of the Recreation and Human Services Department.

To some extent, Alternative (2) is already well in use. The existing Council on Aging/Human Services Department contracts out for limited counseling services for Natick residents who lack health insurance. The four Human Service departments collaborate routinely and utilize the resources of numerous private agencies, including but not limited to the Natick Service Council, local VNA organizations, South Middlesex Opportunity Council, other area Elder Services organizations, AARP – just to name a few.

Research suggests that several communities have instituted an organizational structure in which some or all Human Service functions are consolidated into one department. In the end, some combination of the above methods may be desirable.



# ***Town of Natick***

Human Services Study – Initial Report

---

## **Section IV: Comparative Communities**



# ***Town of Natick***

## **Human Services Study – Initial Report**

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### **Section IV: Comparative Communities**

It is an old maxim of local government – the services provided by towns are as diverse as the communities they represent. Provision of human services is no different. While there certainly is no “one size fits all” in terms of an ideal organizational structure for every community, our research indicates that numerous communities have combined various human service functions into one consolidated department.

In Needham, the Diversified Community Social Services (DCSS) Department was created in 2006 and is comprised of three divisions, namely Council on Aging, Veterans Services and Youth Services.

The Town of Barnstable Community Services Department provides an array of educational and recreational services and programs aimed at wide range of ages and interests. Youth, Senior, Recreation and Veterans’ services – and much more – are administered through this consolidated department.

Through its Community Services Department, the Town of Andover provides a myriad of social, educational, cultural and recreational opportunities for the community’s youth and seniors. Veterans’ Services remains a separate department in Andover.

A task force in Marlborough recently suggested reorganizing and consolidating the city's human services, Council on Aging and Veterans Affairs into one Health and Human Services Department in order to provide improved service delivery, better staff collaboration and shared resources. Although scheduled for implementation July 1, 2011, it is unclear whether this reorganization has yet been implemented.

In our definition of Human Services in Section I, the need for accessibility, accountability and coordination among professionals and agencies was cited as essential to successfully meeting human needs. As the next Section will show, the Administration believes that this success can best be achieved by consolidating Human Services into one department.



## **Section V:**

# **Recommendations & Next Steps**



# ***Town of Natick***

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

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### **Section V: Recommendations & Next Steps**

A hallmark of effective modern organizations is that all operations be analyzed regularly so as to continuously enhance efficiency and productivity. This is something that is done throughout most municipal operations as a matter of course. After initial investigation, research and review, and given the impending opening of the Community/Senior Center and the variety of human service departments that will be working together to provide services to Natick residents, it is the recommendation of the Administration that the departments of Council on Aging, Human Services, Veterans' Services and Recreation and Parks be combined into one department to be known as the Department of Community Services.

To maximize collaboration between these agencies and across the services and programs they deliver, it makes sense that we not depend on interpersonal relations and goodwill. Someone must have the authority to pull it together and the responsibility to do it.

Specifically, I recommend that the consolidated department be presented for vote to the upcoming 2011 Fall Annual Town Meeting. The proposed structure would not, at this time, change any of the personnel or programs within the four "divisions"; rather we would place these divisions under the authority of a new Director of Community Services.

Over the coming months, in advance of the opening of the new Community/Senior Center, the Town Administrator and Director of Community Services would evaluate all services toward achieving the overarching objective of this consolidation effort: to deliver services that residents need and want as effectively and efficiently as possible. Perhaps more than any other type of service that the Town offers, the delivery of human services demands collaboration with other Town departments and private sector groups to ensure that the full range of services is complimentary, not duplicative.

### Continuing Challenges/Future Steps

Much remains to be done to ensure a smooth transition into a new organizational structure and into a new Community/Senior Center. Some – but certainly not all – of those challenges include:

- Providing continuity of services and programs to those currently accessing them
- Engaging staff of the Human Service departments during transition to retain morale, build needed collaboration and ensure a common sense of direction
- Allowing greater community access to facility
- Ensuring that scheduling and utilization of the new Community/Senior Center is respectful of the concerns of older participants
- Enhancing programming to attract younger seniors ("baby boomers")
- Developing intergenerational programming



# ***Town of Natick***

## Human Services Study – Initial Report

---

- Identifying appropriate roles and involvement for the advisory and other committees involved in human service delivery
- Responding to increased requests for social services
- Providing increased number of supportive/preventive programs
- Coordinating the delivery of services and programs with private social service agencies to minimize duplication of services as well as gaps in services